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ABSTRACT

Predicated on the two basic dimensions of leadership--concern for performance of the organization and for relationships among individuals therein--this study investigates differences in leadership style effectiveness of elected and appointed superintendents as perceived by principals, school board presidents, the superintendents themselves, and all three together. The researchers polled all 153 Mississippi school board presidents and superintendents and a representative sample of 44 percent of each category of principals, using the Leader Effectiveness and Adaptability Description, a 12-item questionnaire on leadership behavior perceptions. The findings suggest that appointed superintendents have a greater consensus among superiors and subordinates on their leadership style effectiveness, whereas no conclusive evidence was found to support the contention that a difference exists in the leadership style effectiveness of elected and appointed superintendents. Significant differences were observed, however, between superintendents' self-perceptions and the perceptions of their superiors and subordinates. The implication of these findings is that educational administrators need to cultivate self-awareness by means of communication and feedback with superiors and subordinates. (TE)

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Perceptions of the Leadership Style Effectiveness of Superintendents in Mississippi

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Paper Presented at the Eleventh Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association

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Perceptions of the Leadership Style Effectiveness of Superintendents in Mississippi

The growth in size and complexity of institutions of learning in the United States has brought with it many new problems and challenges for the educational administrator. Great skill is required for successful management of modern schools, and it is obvious that the caliber of the person selected for the superintendency plays a large part in determining the scope and quality of the educational program that will be developed in a school district (AASA, 1962).

The superintendent of schools is the most visible, most vulnerable, and potentially most influential member of the educational organization (Campbell, Cunningham, Nystrand, & Usdan, 1980). The superintendent's role involves clarifying educational goals, evaluating the adequacy of the program in relation to these goals, engaging in a vigorous program of curriculum development and instructional improvement, and coordinating and organizing the school system for effective learning (Gilchrist, 1961). These role expectations require effective leadership. To be an effective leader, one must have the ability to diagnose his environment and adapt his leadership style to fit the demands of the environment (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977). As Gibb (1969) pointed out, the traits of leadership are those personality traits which, in any particular situation, enable an individual to contribute

signigicantly to group locomotion in the direction of a recognized goal and be perceived as doing so by fellow members.

The major purpose of the present research was to investigate the perceived differences, as indicated by principals, superintendents, and school board presidents, in the leadership style effectiveness of elected and appointed superintendents. More specifically, the purposes of this study were:

1. To investigate the differences in perceptions of secondary, elementary, and combination (K-12) school building principals regarding the leadership style effectiveness of elected and appointed superintendents.

2. To investigate the differences in perceptions of school board presidents concerning the leadership style effectiveness of elected and appointed superintendents.

3. To determine if elected and appointed superintendents perceive differences in their leadership style effectiveness.

4. To investigate the differences in leadership style effectiveness of elected and appointed superintendents as perceived by principals, superintendents, and school board presidents.

Theoretical Framework

Research and practice have demonstrated that leadership has two basic dimensions--concern for the performance of the organization and concern for the relationship needs of the persons in the organization. Several investigators have

identified these positions. Cartwright and Zander (1968) describe these as goal achievement and group maintenance. Amatai Etzioni (1961), in the same vein, theorizes that every organization must solve two basic needs: (a) instrumental needs--the mobilization of resources to achieve the task and (b) expressive needs--the social and normative integration of group members. Similarly, Getzels and Guba (1957) label these aspects of leadership behavior as nomothetic and ideographic.

The bulk of evidence indicates that no one style of leadership is consistently more effective than another (Stogdill, 1974). Leaders perceived to be effective are task-oriented at times and concerned with relationships at other times. A plausible explanation is provided by Hersey and Blanchard's (1977) Situa tional Leadership Theory (SLT). SLT is based upon an interplay among the following: (a) the amount of direction (task behavior) a leader gives, (b) the amount of socio-emotional support (relationship behavior) a leader provides, and (c) the maturity level that followers exhibit on a specific task. Maturity is defined as the capacity to set high but attainable goals, willingness and ability to take responsibility, and education and/or experience of an individual of group <u>in relation to a specific task to be performed</u>.

According to SLT, as the level of maturity of their followers continues to increase in terms of accomplishing a specific task, leaders should begin to reduce their task

behavior and increase their relationship behavior. As the followers begin to move into an above average level of maturity, it becomes appropriate for leaders to decrease not only task behavior but relationship behavior as well. The individual or group at this level of maturity sees a reduction of close supervision and an increase in delegation by the leader as a positive indication of trust and confidence. Thus, SLT focuses on the appropriateness or effectiveness of leadership styles according to the task-relevant maturity of the followers.

Lipham (1964) contends that a social system exists to discharge certain institutionalized functions, and these functions are the goals toward which the leader directs the organization. Leader effectiveness is the relative level of this goal achievement (Hoy & Miskel, 1978). To the practicing administrator, effectiveness is even more complicated and subtle than goal attainment. Perceptual evaluations by superiors, peers, and subordinates are important outcomes. Hersey and Blanchard have found that the closer to reality a leader's perception is to the perceptions of others--superiors, peers, and subordinates--the higher the probability that the leader will be able to cope effectively with that environment.

On the basis of this theoretical framework, the following hypotheses have been generated:

H_1 There is a significant difference in the perceptions that secondary, elementary, and combination school building

principals have of the leadership style effectiveness of elected and appointed superintendents.

H_2 School board presidents will perceive a significant difference in the leadership style effectiveness of elected and appointed superintendents.

H_3 There is a significant difference in the perceptions that appointed and elected superintendents have of their leadership style effectiveness.

H_4 Principals, superintendents, and school board presidents will perceive a significant difference in the leadership style effectiveness of elected and appointed superintendents.

Method

Subjects

The population investigated in this study consisted of all school board presidents and superintendents and all principals of secondary, elementary, and combination schools in the state of Mississippi. Mississippi has 153 school districts that operate schools, and each district has a board of education and a superintendent. The president of each school board was included in this study. Of the 153 superintendents, 67 (44%) are elected by popular vote of the electors of that district, and 86 (56%) are appointed by the local board of education. All superintendents were included in this study.

Principals were catagorized first into secondary, elementary, or combination school principals. They were

further categorized as being subordinate to an elected or an appointed superintendent. In order to obtain a sample that was representative of the 810 pricipals in the population, 44% of each category of principals--secondary, elementary, and combination--under elected superintendents was randomly selected. Fifty-six percent of the secondary and elementary principals under appointed superintendents was randomly selected. Due to the small number of combination principals under appointed superintendents, all combination principals in this category were included in the study.

Instrumentation

The Leader Effectiveness and Adaptability Description (LEAD) provides a technique whereby group members may describe the leadership style effectiveness of designated leaders. The LEAD consists of 12 items to which the leader and members of his/her immediate work-group are asked to respond. Each item is a situation with four alternative actions. The respondents are asked to select the action that they feel is most representative of the leader's behavior in that type of situation.

The leader behavior with the highest probability of success, based on Situational Leadership Theory, is weighted +2. The behavior alternative with the lowest probability of success is weighted -2. The second best alternative is weighted +1, and the third, -1. The range of scores is ± 24, with zero being the reference point for determining effectiveness. Hersey and Blanchard (1977) report that the effectiveness scores for the LEAD usually fall between

± 6. This is based on a sample of over 20,000 middle managers from a variety of organizations and cultures who have responded to the LEAD.

Procedure

The subjects of this study were divided into three principal groups: principals, superintendents, and school board presidents. Each group was then subdivided into the method of selecting the superintendent (elected or appointed). Principals were further divided into three levels: secondary, elementary, or combination.

A packet containing the LEAD, a cover letter explaining the study and insuring anonymity, and a pre-addressed, stamped envelope was mailed to each subject. An accurate account of the replies from the subjects was maintained, and approximately one month after the initial mail-out, a second packet was mailed to each subject who had not responded. The initial response accounted for approximately 83% of the total number who participated in the study. The second mail-out increased the number of subjects who participated in the study to 385--a total return of 53%. As reported in Table 1, 232 (55%) principals, 52 (34%) school board presidents, and 101 (66%) superintendents participated in the study.

Table 1

Number and Percent of Subjects Responding

Group	Sample Size	First Return	Second Return	Total Response	% Return
Districts with Elected Superintendents					
Principals					
Secondary	32	14	3	17	53
Elementary	71	31	6	37	52
Combination	40	14	8	22	55
Total	143	59	17	76	53
Board Presidents	67	15	8	23	34
Superintendents	67	34	7	41	61
Districts with Appointed Superintendents					
Principals					
Secondary	94	53	5	58	62
Elementary	171	74	13	87	51
Combination	13	2	9	11	85
Total	278	129	27	156	56
Board Presidents	86	23	6	29	34
Superintendents	86	58	2	60	70

Results

First Hypothesis

Hypothesis one stated: There is a statistically significant difference in the perceptions that secondary, elementary, and combination school building principals have of the leadership style effectiveness of elected and appointed superintendents. The LEAD scores were analyzed by means of a 2 x 3 analysis of variance (method of selection x level of principal). The results, reported in Table 2, revealed a significant interaction (F [2, 226] = 3.12, $p<.05$); therefore, the research by hypothesis was accepted.

The mean scores for each cell (Table 3) were compared using the Newman-Keuls technique (Table 4). The Newman-Keuls analyses indicated significant differences in the perceptions of the three levels of principals who were subordinate to elected superintendents. No differences were observed among principals who served under an appointed superintendent. Analysis across method of selection indicated significant differences among secondary principals and among combination principals.

Second Hypothesis

Hypothesis two stated: School board presidents will perceive a statistically significant difference in the leadership style effectiveness of elected and appointed superintendents. The scores for the two groups (board presidents superior to an elected superintendent and those superior to an appointed superintendent) were compared by means of an

Table 2

Summary of Analysis of Variance of

Principal's LEAD Scores

Source	df	MS	F
Method of Selection	1	24.97	.52
Level of Principal	2	61.00	1.28
Interaction	2	148.70	3.12*
Residual	226	47.66	

*$p < .05$

Table 3

Cell Means:

Method of Selection by Level of Principal

Method of Selection	Level of Principal		
	S[a]	E[b]	C[c]
Elected	1.85	4.32	8.15
Appointed	5.38	6.08	3.80

[a]Secondary

[b]Elementary

[c]Combination

Table 4

Summary of Newman-Keuls Comparisons

Comparisons	
Across Levels of Principals	
Elected Superintendents	
Secondary vs Elementary	2.47*
Secondary vs Combination	6.30**
Elementary vs Combination	3.83**
Appointed Superintendents	
Secondary vs Elementary	.70
Secondary vs Combination	1.58
Elementary vs Combination	2.28
Across Method of Selection	
Elected vs Appointed	
Secondary	3.53**
Elementary	1.76
Combination	4.35**

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$

independent group t-test. The t, reported in Table 5, was nonsignificant (t [50] = 1.84, ns); therefore, the research hypothesis was rejected. These results should, however, be interpreted with caution. Two scores in one distribution were very extreme--2.29 standard deviations above the mean--while all other scores were within one standard deviation of the mean. The researcher investigated by removing the two outlayers and recalculating the t. Significance was found at the .01 level. It appears likely, then, that a Type II error might have been committed.

Third Hypothesis

Hypothesis three stated: There is a statistically significant difference in the perceptions that appointed and elected superintendents have of their leadership style effectiveness. To test the hypothesis, the scores of the two groups of superintendents were subjected to an independent group t-test. The t value, reported in Table 6, indicates that the means of the two groups were not significantly different (t [99] = .12, ns). Therefore, the research hypothesis was rejected.

Fourth Hypothesis

Hypothesis four stated: Principals, superintendents, and school board presidents will perceive a significant difference in the leadership style effectiveness of elected and appointed superintendents. The three levels of principals (secondary, elementary, and combination) were placed in one group designated "principals." A 2 x 3 analysis of variance

Table 5

Means, Standard Deviations, and *t* for

School Board Presidents on the LEAD

Board Presidents	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	t
Elected	7.09	4.60	50	1.84, ns
Appointed	4.07	6.52		

Note. Board presidents are superior to either elected or appointed superintendents and were groups accordingly.

Table 6

Means, Standard Deviations, and *t* for

Elected and Appointed Superintendents

Superintendents	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	t
Elected	9.73	4.45	99	.12, ns
Appointed	9.62	4.88		

was utilized to test the hypothesis. The results, displayed in Table 7, yielded no significant interaction; however, significant main effects for position were revealed, which indicates that principals, superintendents, and school board presidents viewed the leadership style effectiveness of superintendents differently (F [2, 382] = 16.75, $p<.01$). Inspection of the column means, reported in Table 8, indicates that superintendents percieved themselves to be significantly more effective than do their subordinates or superiors.

Discussion

This study was predicated on the supposition that differences exist in the leadership style effectiveness of elected and appointed superintendents, and, since a leader is often blind to his own "leadership personality," differences exist in the way a leader percieves himself and the way his superiors and subordinates perceive him. Differences were observed in the perceptions of secondary, elementary, and combination school principals regarding the leadership style effectiveness of elected and appointed superintendents. In districts with elected superintendents, elementary principals perceived the superintendent to be more effective than did secondary principals. Combination principals viewed the superintendent to be more effective than did either secondary or elementary principals. These differences were not observed in districts with appointed superintendents. Evidently, district organization, district size, or a combination of these may contribute to these differences. More research is needed in this

Table 7

Summary of Analysis of Variance of

LEAD Scores for Principals, Superintendents, and Board Presidents

Source	df	MS	F
Method of Selection	1	[illegible]	.13
Position	2	668.83	16.75*
Interaction	2	59.90	1.50
Residual	379	39.93	

*$p < .01$

Table 8

Mean Scores for Main Effects:

Position and Method of Selection

Main Effects	$\bar{X}$
Position	
Principals	5.42
Superintendents	9.66
Board Presidents	5.40
Method of Selection	
Elected	6.69
Appointed	6.44

area since these factors were beyond the scope of this study. This finding does suggest, however, that districts with appointed superintendents may be more stable with regard to the perceptions that subordinates have of the leadership style effectiveness of superintendents.

No conclusive evidence was found to support the contention that a difference exists in the leadership style effectiveness of elected and appointed superintendents. It seems likely that this unexpected finding may be explained by the homogeneity of the superintendents as a group. Superintendents in Mississippi, whether elected or appointed, operate in a similar manner and interact with each other often. It would be reasonable to assume, then, that the superintendents, as they interact, begin to adopt the behavior patterns of each other. The administrative sophistication and training of the superintendents may also contribute to the similarity of the two groups. Through graduate coursework, in-service training, and perusal of the literature, superintendents are exposed to the kinds of behaviors they should manifest.

Significant differences were observed between perceptions of the superintendents and their superiors and subordinates. As Hoy and Miskel (1978) point out, these perceptual evaluations are important outcomes. The leadership style of an individual is the behavior that person exhibits when attempting to influence the activities of others--as perceived by those others. It would be possible, then, for a leader to

perceive himself as exhibiting an effective leadership style, when, in fact, this perception may not reflect the actual leader behavior, depending upon the extent to which a leader's self-perception is consistent with that of his superiors and subordinates.

This may be explained by the idea that there are some behaviors engaged in by leaders that are known to the leaders, while other behaviors may not be known. That is, leaders may not be aware of portions of their personality that are exhibited when dealing with others. It seems this could result from poor communication habits and a lack of feedback between the leader and his associates.

University departments of educational administration need to be cognizant of these potential stumbling blocks to effective leader behavior. By offering in-service training and workshops in areas such as self-concept and sensitivity, and through programs that develop effective communication techniques and those that investigate leadership theories, departments of educational administration can train leaders to analyze themselves and their situation to resolve the kinds of differences that were portrayed in the findings of this study.

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